# COCOA FARMERS PERCEPTIONS ON CHILD LABOUR PRACTICES IN COCOA FARMS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF IKOM AND INI, NIGERIA

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## Abstract

This study details findings from a comparative study on perceptions of cocoa farmers with regard to child labour activities in cocoa farms in Ikom Local Government Area (LGA) of Cross River State and Ini LGA of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Specific objectives analyzed respondents' perceptions on; what constitutes child labour in cocoa production, effects of child labour practices on children, and major constraints to ending child labour in cocoa farms. A hypothesis was tested, to ascertain the existence or otherwise of a significant difference in the perceptions of farmers in the two areas with regard to what constitutes child labour. Data were collected from 200 randomly selected respondents and analysed with means and ranks and independent sample t-test. Results showed respondents' congruence of perceptions with regards to the issues at stake. It is concluded that eradicating child labour in cocoa production requires multi-dimensional socio-cultural and economic interventions. It recommends enhanced policy implementation, targeted economic empowerment and community sensitization to reshape local attitudes toward child labour.

**Keywords:** Child labour, cocoa farmers, perception, constraints, rural development, Ikom, Ini, Nigeria.

## 1.0 Introduction

The cocoa sector is a critical driver of agricultural and economic development in Nigeria, especially in the southern regions where agro-ecological conditions are favourable for cocoa cultivation (Amuda and Alabdulrahman, 2024). Cocoa remains one of Nigeria's top agricultural exports, supporting the livelihoods of thousands of rural households and contributing significantly to the country's foreign exchange earnings (Bello and Mitchell, 2018). In the cocoa-producing regions of Akwa Ibom and Cross River States, communities are deeply embedded in the cocoa value chain through both smallholder

farming and local trade networks. However, the labour demands of cocoa production are intensive and span a wide range of physical tasks—from clearing and weeding to harvesting, fermenting, and drying (Kongor et al., 2024). In many of these communities, children are commonly involved in these labour processes. While such involvement may traditionally be regarded as a form of social apprenticeship or family labour, many of these tasks often fall under the international definition of child labour due to their hazardous nature, long hours, and interference with children's education and development.

Efforts to eliminate child labour in the cocoa sector have gained significant momentum globally, with several international conventions and frameworks, such as the ILO Minimum Age Convention (No. 138) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182), highlighting the urgency of protecting children from economic exploitation (ILO, 2017). Despite these frameworks and increasing advocacy, child labour remains widespread in West African cocoa farms, including in Nigeria (Thorsen and Maconachie, 2023). This persistence raises critical questions about the socio-cultural and economic underpinnings of child labour, as well as the local farmers' interpretations and responses to it. Understanding how child labour is perceived by those directly engaged in cocoa production is essential to bridging the gap between policy prescriptions and on-ground realities. Cocoa farmers, as central actors in the production and marketing of cocoa, hold key insights into why child labour continues, what efforts are being made to reduce it, and

what obstacles are encountered along the way.

The cocoa-producing areas in Nigeria present a valuable context for examining these issues. Although these regions contribute significantly to national cocoa output, they differ in their socio-economic structures, cultural norms, and market dynamics (Afolayan, 2020). These differences may influence how child labour is defined, justified, or contested by local actors. For instance, in one area, child participation in farm work may be framed as an economic necessity, while in another, it may be perceived as a cultural obligation or informal training. Therefore, disaggregating stakeholder perceptions along these geographic and occupational lines offers deeper insights into the drivers and consequences of child labour in cocoa farming.

The rationale for this study is rooted in the need to provide context-specific, evidence-based insights that can support the design and implementation of culturally appropriate strategies to reduce child labour in cocoa production. Interventions that fail to account for local perceptions, values, and constraints often encounter resistance or prove ineffective. By exploring the beliefs, challenges, and perceived impacts of child labour among cocoa stakeholders, this study sought to inform not only national policy directions but also the operational strategies of NGOs, extension services, and community development initiatives focused on ethical cocoa production and sustainable rural development.

As previously stated, despite growing national and international efforts to eradicate child labour in agriculture, particularly within the cocoa sector, evidence indicates that the practice remains deeply entrenched in many cocoa-producing regions of Nigeria (Berlan, 2013; Williams et al., 2016). One of the most pressing concerns is the normalization of children's involvement in labour-intensive cocoa farming activities, which are often hazardous, physically demanding, and detrimental to the overall development and well-being of the child (Thorsen and Maconachie, 2023). In rural cocoa communities in Nigeria (including Ini and Ikom), child participation in cocoa production is frequently perceived not as exploitation, but as part of cultural and economic survival strategies (Afolayan, 2020). Such perceptions, according to Hoque (2023), are shaped by entrenched socio-cultural norms, weak awareness of child protection laws, and the pervasive poverty that compels families to rely on their children for labour. In many cases, children are removed from school during peak farming seasons, exposing them to physical injuries, fatigue, and psychological stress, thereby compromising their educational attainment and long-term human capital development.

Moreover, interventions aimed at addressing child labour in the cocoa sector often face significant implementation challenges due to a lack of alignment with local realities (Berlan, 2013). There is a conspicuous gap in the understanding of how cocoa farmers conceptualize child labour, which undermines the relevance and sustainability of externally driven child labour mitigation efforts. Institutional enforcement of child labour regulations remains weak, with limited monitoring and support from agricultural extension services, social protection systems, and rural development agencies. In addition, farmers often face economic constraints such as low cocoa prices, lack of access to affordable adult labour, and absence of mechanized alternatives, all of which perpetuate dependence on child labour (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 2020). The absence of context-specific research that explores the perceptions, challenges, and consequences of child labour from the perspectives of cocoa value chain actors continues to pose a critical barrier to designing effective, community-based solutions. It is within this context that the current study was conceived to fill this gap by critically examining stakeholder perceptions and uncovering the challenges that hinder efforts to reduce child labour in cocoa farms across Ikom and Ini Local Government Areas (LGAs). The general aim of this study was to assess the perceptions of cocoa farmers with regards to the use of child labour in various cocoa production practices in Ini LGA of Akwa Ibom State and Ikom LGA of Cross River State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives were designed to document cocoa farmers' perceptions of; what constitutes child labour practices in cocoa farms in the study area, effect of child labour practices on children and cocoa farming activities in the study area, and the challenges to ameliorating child labour practices in cocoa farms in the study area. A hypothesis was also tested, to ascertain the existence or otherwise of a significant

difference in the perception of cocoa farmers on what constitutes child labour practices in Ini LGA of Akwa Ibom State and Ikom LGA of Cross River State, Nigeria.

## 2.0 Methodology

This study was conducted in both Ikom LGA of Cross River State and Ini LGA of Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. Both LGAs are prominent cocoa-producing regions in the South-South geopolitical zone of the country and are strategically located within the rainforest belt known for supporting cocoa cultivation. Ini LGA, located in the northwestern part of Akwa Ibom State, lies approximately between latitudes 5°25′N and 5°35′N and longitudes 7°30′E and 7°45′E. The area experiences a humid tropical climate with an average annual rainfall of 2,000–2,500 mm, primarily between March and October. The terrain is undulating, and the soil is loamy and well-drained, making it suitable for cocoa production. Agricultural activities dominate the local economy, with cocoa being a significant cash crop cultivated by many smallholder farmers. The area also has rural settlements where child labour issues have increasingly become a concern due to economic and social pressures.

Ikom LGA, located in the central region of Cross River State, lies approximately between latitudes 5°57′N and 6°15′N and longitudes 8°40′E and 8°50′E. Ikom is widely regarded as the cocoa hub of Cross River State due to its extensive cocoa plantations and long-standing history of commercial cocoa farming. The area receives an average annual rainfall of 2,500–3,000 mm, supporting dense forest vegetation and perennial agricultural activities. Like Ini LGA, the local economy is primarily agrarian, with cocoa production forming a vital part of household income. The prevalence of child labour in Ikom has also been a growing concern, especially with children participating in various farm-related tasks due to poverty, family labour dynamics, and cultural practices. These two LGAs were purposively selected for the study due to their comparative significance in cocoa production within their respective states and the need to understand the perceptions and challenges surrounding child labour practices in their cocoa value chains.

The population of the study included all the cocoa farmers' resident in Ini LGA of Akwa Ibom State and Ikom LGA of Cross River State, Nigeria. The study adopted a 2-stage sampling technique. The first stage involved randomly selecting 10 villages from each LGA. The second stage involved randomly selecting 10 cocoa farmers from each of the 10 selected villages in each LGA, for a total of 100 cocoa farmers for each LGA. In totality, 200 participants were surveyed.

Both Primary and secondary data were used in this study. Primary data were collected from 200 respondents using a reliable (i.e. having a reliability coefficient score of 0.94) and content-validated semi-structured questionnaire specifically designed by the researcher to capture the construct and objectives of the study. The secondary data were collected from relevant agencies including the State Ministries of Agriculture. Collated data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics (frequency, mean, percentages, standard deviation, ranks and independent t-test).

Cocoa farmers' perception of what constitutes child labour in cocoa production was operationalised with the aid of a 10-point list of perception variables to which respondents were required to respond with the aid of a four-point Likert scale of strongly disagreed-1 point, disagreed - 2 points, agreed-3 points and strongly agreed-4 points. Effect of child labour practices was measured by using binary logistic model such as; Yes = 2 and No = 1 to respond to a 10-pointer set of variables. With regard to constraints to amelioration of child labour practices, respondents were required to utilise Yes = 2 and No = 1 responses to respond to a 14-pointer list of drawn-up constraint variable items.

## 3.0 Findings and Discussion

### 3.1 Perception of What Constitutes Child Labour in Cocoa Production Responses by Cocoa Farmers in Ikom LGA

Table 1 reveals the perception of cocoa farmers in Ikom LGA of what constitutes child labour. The three highest ranked variables were: Activities that prevent children from attending schools (x=3.10; rank=1st); activities that are harmful to child health, safety, and morals (x=3.07; (rank=2nd); and activities that exploit the child's right and freedom (x=3.04; rank=3rd). The lowest ranking perceptions included: activities that involve light farm work (x=2.21; rank=10th); economic activity performed by children under 18 years (x=2.68; rank=9th); and using children for domestic assignments against their wishes (x=2.73; rank=8th).

It is obvious that children may spend most of their time on the farm rather than in the schools, become involved in strenuous activities that are harmful to their level of development, and keep them ignorant of their right to education, healthcare, and freedom from bonded labour. Baah and Anchirinah (2010) have discovered that small-scale farmers are the most important stakeholders as far as cocoa cultivation is concerned because they produce the product as output. The above findings on farmers' perceptions of child labour corroborate the studies of Ofuoku *et al*. (2014) about what child labour is and what it is not.

**Table 1:    Distribution of respondents based on their Perception of What Constitutes Child Labour (Ikom LGA)**

| S/N | | SD | D | A | SA | x̄ | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Child labour is an economic activity performed by children under 18 years | 19 | 24 | 27 | 30 | 2.68 | 9th |
| 2 | Activities that are harmful to a child's health, safety, and morals | 2 | 20 | 47 | 31 | 3.07 | 2nd |
| 3 | Activities that involve light farm work | 24 | 37 | 33 | 6 | 2.21 | 10th |
| 4 | Affect the children's physical and psychological development | 9 | 11 | 51 | 29 | 3.00 | 4th |
| 5 | Prevent children from attending school | 6 | 11 | 50 | 33 | 3.10 | 1st |
| 6 | Activities that exploit the child's rights and freedom | 10 | 7 | 52 | 31 | 3.04 | 3rd |
| 7 | Children doing hazardous farm work, like spraying agrochemicals | 8 | 21 | 46 | 25 | 2.88 | 6th |
| 8 | Use of children for debt bondage | 13 | 12 | 51 | 24 | 2.86 | 7th |
| 9 | Using children for domestic assignments against their wishes | 21 | 7 | 50 | 22 | 2.73 | 8th |
| 10 | Child exploitation | 4 | 10 | 19 | 13 | 2.89 | 5th |

Source: Field Data (2024)

**Responses by Cocoa Farmers in Ini LGA**

Table 2 shows the three highest ranked perceptions of cocoa farmers in Ini LGA on what constitutes child labour. The responses were; activities that prevent children from attending school ($\bar{x}$ = 3.42; rank = 1st), activities that exploit the child's rights and freedom ($\bar{x}$ = 3.25; rank = 2nd), and activities that are harmful to a child's health, safety, and morals ($\bar{x}$ = 3.21; rank = 3rd). Other highly ranked perceptions included those related to the physical and psychological development of children ($\bar{x}$ = 3.20; rank = 4th) and the involvement of children in hazardous farm work such as spraying agrochemicals ($\bar{x}$ = 3.12; tied rank = 5th).

On the other hand, the least perceived forms of child labour were: activities that involve light farm work ($\bar{x}$ = 2.30; rank = 9th); use of children for debt bondage ($\bar{x}$ = 2.79; rank = 8th), and child labour as an economic activity performed by children under 18 years ($\bar{x}$ = 2.91; rank = 7th).

Cocoa farming activities typically occur in the early hours of the day, between 6:00 am and 12:00 pm—coinciding with school hours. Hence, as perceived by cocoa farmers, engaging children in such farm work hinders their access to education, violates their fundamental rights, and disrupts their physical and mental development. These findings emphasize that while certain farming tasks may seem light or harmless, they can collectively reinforce a cycle of educational deprivation and childhood exploitation. These findings support the assertions of Baah and Anchirinah (2010)

and Mortein and Anne (2006) who all stated that child labour is an economic activity performed by a person under the age of 15 years, which prevents the child from attending schools, subject them to debt bondage, armed conflict, commercial sexual exploitation and drug trafficking.

**Table 2:** **Distribution of respondents based on their Perception of What Constitutes Child Labour in Cocoa Production (Ini LGA)**

| S/N | Perception Statements | SD | D | A | SA | X̄ | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Child labour is an economic activity performed by children under 18 years | 12 | 15 | 43 | 30 | 2.91 | 7th |
| 2 | Activities that are harmful to a child's health, safety, and morals | 7 | 10 | 38 | 45 | 3.21 | 3rd |
| 3 | Activities that involve light farm work | 25 | 30 | 35 | 10 | 2.30 | 9th |
| 4 | Affect the children's physical and psychological development | 5 | 10 | 45 | 40 | 3.20 | 4th |
| 5 | Prevent children from attending school | 3 | 7 | 35 | 55 | 3.42 | 1st |
| 6 | Activities that exploit the child's rights and freedom | 5 | 10 | 40 | 45 | 3.25 | 2nd |
| 7 | Children doing hazardous farm work like spraying agrochemicals | 8 | 12 | 40 | 40 | 3.12 | 5th |
| 8 | Use of children for debt bondage | 15 | 18 | 40 | 27 | 2.79 | 8th |
| 9 | Using children for domestic assignments (work) against their wishes | 10 | 10 | 38 | 42 | 3.12 | 5th |

Source: Field Data (2024)

## 3.2 Perceived Effects of Child Labour Practices in Cocoa Farms

### 3.2.1 Responses by Cocoa Farmers in Ikom LGA on Perceived Effects of Child Labour Practices in Cocoa Farms

From Table 3, the three major perceived effects of child labour practices by farmers were: Injuries, such as dislocation of joints, bruising, and scars (x̄ = 1.94; rank = 1st); muscle pains (x̄ = 1.93; rank = 2nd); and physical symptoms, such as neck, back, and shoulder pain (x̄ = 1.92; rank = 3rd).

These represent the most immediate and visible physical consequences of engaging children in farm labour, indicating that farmers are highly aware of the bodily harm associated with such practices.

On the other hand, the least perceived effects of child labour in the study area included: Stigmatization (x̄ = 1.70; rank = 15th); kidnapping (x̄ = 1.73; Rank = 14th); and poor mental, spiritual, and social development (x̄ = 1.74; rank = 13th). These effects, though severe in implication, might not be immediately visible or may be underreported due to cultural silence or

limited awareness among respondents regarding long-term psychosocial consequences.

The findings align with previous studies on child labour in agriculture, where the physical risks, such as injuries, exposure to harmful chemicals, and long working hours, were often cited as the primary concerns. For instance, Johnson-Michael (2013) noted that children are often careless and tend to work without proper protective gear, heightening their exposure to farm-related hazards. This, coupled with their limited knowledge about occupational safety, increases their vulnerability to accidents and injuries in the farming environment.

Therefore, the results underscore the need for increased sensitization among rural farming communities about not only the physical but also the psychological and developmental consequences of child labour, to guide more holistic interventions.

**Table 3:       Distribution of respondents in Ikom LGA based on the Perceived Effects of Child Labour Practices by cocoa Farmers**

| S/N | | Yes F (%) | No F (%) | x̄ | SD | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Injuries, e.g., dislocation of joints, bruising, and scars | 94 (94.0%) | 6(6.0%) | 1.94 | .239 | 1st |
| 2 | Physical symptoms, e.g., Neck, back, and shoulder pain | 92(92.0%) | 8(8.0%) | 1.92 | .273 | 3rd |
| 3 | Muscle pains | 92(92.0%) | 7(7.0%) | 1.93 | .321 | 2nd |
| 4 | Disease, e.g., rashes, insect bites | 94(94.0%) | 6(6.0%) | 1.94 | .239 | 1st |
| 5 | Chemical poisoning, e.g., nausea, dizziness, and coughing | 90(90.0%) | 10(10.0%) | 1.90 | .302 | 5th |
| 6 | Danger from snake bites, bee stings, and wild animals | 94(94.0%) | 6(6.0%) | 1.94 | .239 | 1st |
| 7 | Physical damages due to falls, musculoskeletal disorders, and farm tools | 91(91.0%) | 9(9.0%) | 1.91 | .288 | 4th |
| 8 | Poor child development | 80(80.0%) | 20(20.0%) | 1.80 | .402 | 6th |
| 9 | Increase the level of illiteracy | 80(80.0%) | 20(20.0%) | 1.80 | .402 | 6th |
| 10 | Poor mental, spiritual, and social development | 74(74.0%) | 26(26.0%) | 1.74 | .441 | 10th |
| 11 | Poor reproductive health | 63(63.0%) | 37(37.0%) | 1.63 | .485 | 13th |
| 12 | Sexual harassment | 77(77.0%) | 23(23.0%) | 1.77 | .423 | 8th |
| 13 | Rapes | 79(79.0%) | 21(21.0%) | 1.79 | .409 | 7th |
| 14 | Kidnapping | 73(73.0%) | 26(26.0%) | 1.73 | .473 | 11th |
| 15 | Stigmatization | 71(71.0%) | 28(28.0%) | 1.71 | .482 | 12th |
| 16 | Violence (verbal abuse) | 76(76.0%) | 23(23.0%) | 1.75 | .458 | 9th |

Source: Field Data (2024)

### 3.2.2 Responses by Cocoa Farmers in Ini LGA on Perceived Effects of Child Labour Practices in Cocoa Farms

From Table 4, the following effects were ranked highest as major perceived effects of child labour practices by cocoa farmers in Ini LGA: Physical symptoms, such as neck, back, and shoulder pain ($\bar{x} = 1.97$; rank = 1st), injuries, such as dislocation of joints, bruising, and scars ($\bar{x} = 1.95$; rank = 2nd), and muscle pains ($\bar{x} = 1.95$; rank = 2nd). These represent the most immediate and physically noticeable effects of child labour, indicating that cocoa farmers are highly aware of the bodily harm associated with involving children in farm work. The repetitive and strenuous nature of cocoa farming tasks may contribute significantly to these physical conditions among child labourers.

Conversely, the least perceived effects of child labour practices included: Poor reproductive health ($\bar{x} = 1.53$; Rank = 12th); increased level of illiteracy ($\bar{x} = 1.68$; rank = 11th), and poor mental, spiritual, and social development ($\bar{x} = 1.68$; rank = 11th). These outcomes, although critical, may not be readily observable or may be underestimated due to limited awareness or cultural factors that suppress open discourse on sensitive issues like reproductive health and mental well-being. The relatively lower perception of educational and psychosocial impacts suggests a gap in understanding the long-term developmental consequences of child labour.

The findings are consistent with previous studies that highlight the predominance of physical hazards in child labour within agricultural settings. According to Pirkle and Zimmerman (2024), children working in cocoa farms often experience musculoskeletal disorders and are at high risk of injuries due to overexertion, prolonged working hours, and the use of sharp tools. Additionally, children rarely use personal protective equipment, increasing their vulnerability to physical harm.

Therefore, these results point to a critical need for targeted awareness campaigns among cocoa farming communities. It is not enough to only recognize physical dangers; farmers and local stakeholders must also be sensitized to the psychological, educational, and developmental risks that child labour poses. Addressing these broader issues through education and policy interventions can help create a more protective environment for children and reduce their engagement in hazardous labour.

**Table 4:      Distribution of respondents in Ini LGA based on the Perceived Effects of Child Labour Practices by cocoa Farmers**

| S/N | Variable | Yes (%) | No (%) | Mean Score | Rank |
|-----|----------|---------|--------|-----------|------|
| 1 | Injuries, e.g., dislocation of joints, bruising, and scars | 95 (95.0%) | 5 (5.0%) | 1.95 | 2rd |
| 2 | Physical symptoms, e.g., Neck, back, and shoulder pain | 97 (97.5%) | 3 (2.5%) | 1.97 | 1st |
| 3 | Muscle pains | 95 (95.0%) | 5 (5.0%) | 1.95 | 2rd |
| 4 | Disease, e.g., rashes, insect bites | 88 (88.0%) | 12 (12.0%) | 1.88 | 4th |
| 5 | Chemical poisoning, e.g., nausea, dizziness, and coughing | 87 (87.0%) | 13 (13.0%) | 1.87 | 5th |
| 6 | Danger from snake bites, bee stings, and wild animals | 87 (87.0%) | 13 (13.0%) | 1.87 | 5th |
| 7 | Physical damages due to falls, musculoskeletal disorders, and farm tools | 90 (90.0%) | 10 (10.0%) | 1.90 | 3th |
| 8 | Poor child development | 75 (75.0%) | 25 (25.0%) | 1.75 | 9th |
| 9 | Increased level of illiteracy | 68 (68.0%) | 32 (32.0%) | 1.68 | 11th |
| 10 | Poor mental, spiritual, and social development | 68 (68.0%) | 32 (32.0%) | 1.68 | 11th |
| 11 | Poor reproductive health | 53 (53.0%) | 47 (47.0%) | 1.53 | 12th |
| 12 | Sexual harassment | 78 (78.0%) | 22 (22.0%) | 1.78 | 7th |
| 13 | Rapes | 83 (83.0%) | 17 (17.0%) | 1.83 | 6th |
| 14 | Kidnapping | 73 (73.0%) | 27 (27.0%) | 1.73 | 10th |
| 15 | Stigmatization | 78 (78.0%) | 22 (22.0%) | 1.78 | 8th |
| 16 | Violence (verbal abuse) | 80 (80.0%) | 20 (20.0%) | 1.80 | 7th |

Source: Field Data (2024)

### 3.3 Constraints to Ending Child Labour in Cocoa Production
### 3.3.1 Responses by Cocoa Farmers in Ikom LGA

Based on Table 5, the three highest-ranking challenges perceived by farmers based in Ikom as thwarting efforts to ameliorate child labour in cocoa production are: Lack of enforcement of child labour laws ($\bar{x} = 1.80$; rank = 1st); poverty status of farmers ($\bar{x} = 1.79$; rank = 2nd), and non-implementation of government policies on child labour ($\bar{x} = 1.75$; rank = 3rd).

These findings indicate that institutional and economic factors are viewed as the most pressing drivers of child labour in cocoa farming communities. The lack of enforcement reflects a systemic failure in

implementing existing legal frameworks that protect children, while poverty continues to act as a fundamental push factor, compelling families to depend on their children's labour for survival. This is consistent with Balch (2018) who argued that until efforts are made to lift cocoa farmers out of poverty, the issue of child labour will persist. Other notable factors include weak government policies ($\bar{x}$ = 1.72; rank = 4th) and hunger ($\bar{x}$ = 1.72; rank = 4th), both of which further highlight the vulnerabilities in the socio-economic and policy landscape. These factors create a context where children are

often compelled to work to support household income and food security. The findings are indicative of the fact that resolving the issue of child labour requires a multidimensional approach: strengthening institutional enforcement, addressing poverty, ensuring the implementation of child protection policies, and improving basic living conditions such as food access. According to the farmers' perspectives, tackling these core issues would significantly reduce the reliance on child labour in cocoa production systems.

**Table 5: Distribution of respondents in Ikom LGA based on the Constraints to Ameliorating Child Labour in Cocoa Production by Farmers**

| S/N | Item | Yes (%) | No (%) | $\bar{x}$ | SD | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Lack of enforcement of child labour laws | 80 | 20 | 1.80 | 0.721 | 1st |
| 2 | Poverty (mode of livelihood) | 79 | 21 | 1.79 | 0.709 | 2nd |
| 3 | Non-implementation of government policies | 75 | 25 | 1.75 | 0.661 | 3rd |
| 4 | Weak government policies | 72 | 28 | 1.72 | 0.629 | 4th |
| 5 | Hunger | 72 | 28 | 1.72 | 0.629 | 4th |
| 6 | Farmers' anxiety for higher profit | 71 | 29 | 1.71 | 0.618 | 6th |
| 7 | Lack of awareness | 69 | 31 | 1.69 | 0.599 | 7th |
| 8 | Poor data and collection | 68 | 32 | 1.68 | 0.589 | 8th |
| 9 | Poor rural infrastructure | 68 | 32 | 1.68 | 0.589 | 8th |
| 10 | Poor pricing of the cocoa product | 66 | 33 | 1.66 | 0.571 | 10th |
| 11 | Political instability | 63 | 37 | 1.63 | 0.548 | 11th |
| 12 | Cultural factors | 63 | 37 | 1.63 | 0.548 | 11th |
| 13 | Debt bondage | 62 | 38 | 1.62 | 0.541 | 13th |
| 14 | Conflict | 53 | 47 | 1.53 | 0.503 | 14th |

Source: Field Data (2024)

### 3.3.2 Responses by Cocoa Farmers in Ini LGA

Based on Table 6, the three highest-ranking constraints perceived by cocoa farmers in Ini LGA regarding variables constraining eradication of child labour in cocoa production are: Poverty status (mode of livelihood) ($\bar{x}$ = 1.825; rank = 1st); lack of enforcement of child labour laws ($\bar{x}$ = 1.825; rank = 1st); and non-implementation of government policies on child labour ($\bar{x}$ = 1.800; rank = 3rd). These findings reveal that both economic deprivation and institutional weaknesses are the foremost challenges to ameliorating child labour in cocoa farming. The two highest-ranking factors—poverty and lack of enforcement—underscore how the economic realities of farmers and failures in legal oversight converge to perpetuate child labour practices. These observations align with Balch's (2018) position on the fact addressing systemic poverty and weak enforcement mechanisms shall tend to ameliorate child labour issues in the cocoa production industry.

The issues of hunger ($\bar{x}$ = 1.775; rank = 4th), along with farmers' anxiety for higher profit and weak government policies (both $\bar{x}$ = 1.725; rank = 5th), further amplify the socio-economic and policy pressures driving child labour. These suggest that immediate household needs and the pressure to sustain income generation continue to motivate the engagement of children in cocoa-related tasks. On the same pedestal, lack of awareness and poor data collection (both of mean ($\bar{x}$) = 1.700; rank = 7th) point to informational and administrative gaps that hinder targeted interventions. Without adequate data and sensitization, efforts to curb child labour may lack precision and reach.

In contrast, conflict, debt bondage, political instability, and cultural factors (all of mean ($\bar{x}$) = 1.650; rank = 10th) were rated lower, indicating that while still relevant, these are not currently perceived by farmers as the primary barriers to progress. This ranking shift signals that the issue is now seen more through the lens of economic survival and ineffective policy execution than traditional or geopolitical concerns.

Overall, the findings suggest that eliminating child labour in cocoa farming communities like Ini LGA requires multi-pronged strategies. Addressing economic hardship, enforcing existing laws, improving policy implementation, and enhancing awareness are critical steps toward sustainable change, as opined by the ILO (2015). Farmers' perspectives emphasize the need for policy-driven economic support and stronger institutional accountability to reduce the incidence of child labour effectively.

**Table 6:** Distribution of respondents in Ini LGA based on the Constraints to Ameliorating Child Labour in Cocoa Production by Farmers

| S/N | Perceived Drivers of Child Labour in Cocoa Farming | Yes f (%) | No f (%) | Mean | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Poverty (mode of livelihood) | 33 (82.5%) | 7 (17.5%) | 1.82 | 1st |
| 2 | Farmers' anxiety for higher profit | 29 (72.5%) | 11 (27.5%) | 1.72 | 5th |
| 3 | Poor pricing of the cocoa product | 25 (62.5%) | 15 (37.5%) | 1.62 | 10th |
| 4 | Weak government policies | 29 (72.5%) | 11 (27.5%) | 1.72 | 5th |
| 5 | Non-implementation of government policies on child labour | 32 (80.0%) | 8 (20.0%) | 1.80 | 3rd |
| 6 | Lack of awareness | 28 (70.0%) | 12 (30.0%) | 1.70 | 7th |
| 7 | Lack of enforcement of child labour laws | 33 (82.5%) | 7 (17.5%) | 1.82 | 1st |
| 8 | Poor data and collection | 28 (70.0%) | 12 (30.0%) | 1.70 | 7th |
| 9 | Debt bondage | 26 (65.0%) | 14 (35.0%) | 1.65 | 10th |
| 10 | Hunger | 31 (77.5%) | 9 (22.5%) | 1.77 | 4th |
| 11 | Conflict | 26 (65.0%) | 14 (35.0%) | 1.65 | 10th |
| 12 | Political instability | 26 (65.0%) | 14 (35.0%) | 1.65 | 10th |
| 13 | Poor rural infrastructure | 27 (67.5%) | 13 (32.5%) | 1.675 | 9th |
| 14 | Cultural factors | 26 (65.0%) | 14 (35.0%) | 1.650 | 10th |

Source: Field Data (2024)

**4.0 Test of Hypothesis**

**4.1 Differences in the perception of cocoa farmers in Ikom and Ini LGA on child labour practices**

Table 7 below presents information on the independent sample t-test analysis of the study hypothesis which was stated in the null form as "there is no significant difference in the perception of cocoa stakeholders on child labour practices". This hypothesis was tested at a 0.05 probability level, with a degree of freedom of 39. The result gave very low t-values in the respective variables, and evidence from the P-values revealed that indeed there is no significant difference in the perceptions on child labour by both set of cocoa farmers in the two areas of survey. Thus, the null hypothesis was upheld. This result implies that cocoa farmers in both study areas perceived that "child labour is an economic activity performed by children under 18yrs", that child labour include "activities that are harmful to child health, safety and morals", that child labour are "activities that involve light farm work", among others.

**Table 7:** **Independent Sample t-test result showing the difference in the perception of cocoa stakeholders in Ikom and Ini LGA on child labour practices**

| Perception of child labour by cocoa farmers and stakeholders | t-value | df | P-value |
|---|---|---|---|
| Child labour is an economic activity performed by children under 18 years | 1.361 | 39 | 0.181 |
| Activities that are harmful to a child's health, safety, and morals. | 0.771 | 39 | 0.446 |
| Activities that involve light farm work | -0.813 | 39 | 0.421 |
| Affect the children's physical and psychological development | -0.879 | 39 | 0.385 |
| Prevent children from attending school | -1.259 | 39 | 0.215 |
| Activities that exploit the child's rights and freedom | -0.693 | 39 | 0.492 |
| Children doing hazardous farm work like spraying agrochemicals | -0.448 | 39 | 0.656 |
| Use of children for debt bondage | 0.260 | 39 | 0.797 |
| Using children for domestic assignments against their wishes | -0.363 | 39 | 0.719 |

**Source:** Field data, 2024

**5.0 Conclusion**

The findings from this study reveal that cocoa farmers in both Ikom and Ini LGAs have a clear understanding of what constitutes child labour, primarily associating it with activities that hinder children's education, exploit their rights, and harm their health and physical development. Despite this awareness, many farmers still engage children in cocoa farming, largely due to systemic and economic challenges. The most commonly cited factors responsible for the continued use of child labour include poverty, lack of enforcement of child labour laws, and inadequate implementation of government policies.

These findings suggest that while awareness of child labour and its implications exist among cocoa farmers, practical constraints limit their ability to eliminate the practice. Socio-economic hardships and weak institutional frameworks appear to be major contributors to the persistence of child labour in cocoa-producing communities. Consequently, the problem is less about ignorance and more about survival and lack of viable alternatives.

**Recommendations**

i.      Based on the finding that child labour persists due to weak enforcement of existing laws, it is recommended that the Federal and State Governments strengthen monitoring mechanisms by deploying adequately trained labour officers to rural cocoa-producing communities to ensure compliance and penalize violations.

ii.     Given the finding that poverty and economic hardship drive families to involve children in cocoa farming, it is advised that relevant ministries, departments and

agencies (MDAs) implement targeted support programs such as input subsidies and labour-sharing cooperatives to ease the financial burden on smallholder farmers.

iii.     Considering the finding that limited access to quality education encourages school dropout and child labour, educational authorities, in collaboration with NGOs, should expand rural school infrastructure and introduce incentive-based schemes, such as free meals or scholarships, to encourage school attendance.

iv.     In light of the finding that community norms often tolerate or ignore the hazards of child labour, it is imperative that local governments partner with traditional and religious leaders to lead grassroots awareness campaigns that reshape social attitudes and promote child rights.

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